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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century. By R. H. TAWNEY.
New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912. Pp. ix+464.
\$3.00 net.

After a great many learned articles and learned disputes about agrarian conditions in England in the sixteenth century, the time seems to have come when the evidence at hand upon the various aspects of the question should be organized and its relation to English agrarian history as a whole precisely stated. This is part of the task to which Mr. Tawney has addressed himself and there is small room for doubt that he has done this part admirably. But his volume is not merely a work of synthesis. It reveals also a very considerable amount of research upon points which have either escaped the attention of economic historians or have heretofore been imperfectly exploited.

Mr. Tawney approaches the agrarian problem of the sixteenth century from the point of view of its effect upon the social and economic status of the small landholder. With agrarian problems in the precise sense of the term—three field systems, convertible husbandry and the rest—he has little or nothing to do. In this respect his book stands in marked contrast to Professor Gonner's recent volume on "Common Land and Inclosures."

In his first chapters the author discusses at length the conditions of agricultural landholders at the beginning of the sixteenth century. He is of the opinion that the freeholders were, as a class, extremely well off and that they were not materially affected by the agrarian changes which took place later in the century. But he is much more interested in the tenants who held their lands by the custom of the manor. From such figures as are available he concludes that they formed at least two-thirds of the landholding population. In this connection he makes a timely distinction between copyhold tenants, customary tenants, and tenants at will which will be a godsend to many perplexed students of these questions. On the basis of information drawn from the surveys and rentals of 118 manors he attempts to determine the relative importance of these three classes of tenants, and his conclusions confirm the general impression that the copyholders were, by far, the most numerous

class; in a word, that the great mass of the peasant landholders in sixteenth-century England were copyholders.

The agricultural wage-earning class is dismissed with slight mention. Mr. Tawney believes that these did not form a separate class of any significance and that most of the wage-workers were landholding peasants who sought in this way to supplement their incomes. Such evidence as is at hand tends, on the whole, to confirm this view of the matter, but it is doubtful whether any very positive statements should be made upon this subject in the present state of our knowledge; not, at any rate, until old-fashioned views about the economic consequences of the Black Death have been subjected to more searching criticism.

The rest of the book is practically confined to the copyholders. At the outset, the author insists that their economic and social position before the wholesale enclosing of the sixteenth century was much less static than has been generally supposed. He proves pretty conclusively that there had been in times previous a good deal of buying, selling, and exchanging of land among them and he finds a tendency operating in these land transfers toward a greater consolidation of their holdings, along with an increase in size of the average holding, which suggests the evolution of a better-to-do class. He is of the opinion also that many of the richer peasants had begun to enclose for purposes of sheep-grazing before the great enclosure movement. In brief, Mr. Tawney maintains that the copyholder under the old régime was both prosperous and progressive, that his income was increasing in proportion to his expenses, and that he was revealing considerable aptitude toward adjusting his methods of exploiting the soil to the increasing demands of the woolen industry. Clearly the trend of the argument here is toward the conclusion that the sixteenth-century enclosure movement was not only harmful to the copyholder—to which everybody agrees—but that it was also economically unnecessary. Those who defend the enclosure movement will take issue with the author upon this last point and, to the reviewer at least, it does not appear that he has made out his case. The evidence at hand is really too scanty to prove that the copyholder of the sixteenth century was in fact a progressive type of man. It is true of course that in several of the southern counties enclosed fields were already the rule in the fifteenth century, but it is by no means certain that this condition of things was the result of an earlier enclosing movement among the peasantry.

In the second part of the book, the author deals with the transition to what he calls capitalist agriculture, that is to say, with the wholesale

enclosing of the sixteenth century. Here, in the main, he follows Professor Gay's conclusions (*Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XVII, 576 f.), both as to the area of the enclosing movement and as to its general character. He rejects Mr. Leadam's contention, which seems indeed to have small ground to stand on, that much, if not most, of the sixteenth-century enclosing was for purposes of agriculture (*Trans. Royal Hist. Society*, N.S., XIV, 231 f.). On the other hand, he believes that Professor Gay has underestimated the importance of the movement. Here the reviewer is inclined to agree with him. Even if one accepts Professor Gay's conjectural figures that only 2.76 per cent of the total area of England was enclosed during the sixteenth century, one still has to ask what proportion of England was actually under the plough in 1500 before one can argue much from these figures, and one still has to reckon with contemporary opinion. Sixteenth-century statistics, as Professor Gay himself insists, are so unreliable that the views of contemporaries deserve more weight than he has been disposed to accord to them.

One of the most valuable chapters in the book deals with the difficult question of tenant right. Here Mr. Tawney has had to come to some conclusion as to the legal security of copyholders in the face of the conflicting opinions of Mr. Leadam and Professor Ashley, and he does so, gracefully and adroitly and, as it seems to the reviewer, conclusively. That some copyholders had legal redress against eviction, Mr. Leadam has proved; that some did not, Professor Ashley has also proved. But both have tried to argue from particular cases to a general rule. The truth appears to have been that, since the copyholder held his lands by the custom of the manor, the security of his tenure would necessarily depend upon the character of the customs by which he held. In other words, the King's Courts would determine each case according to the laws of the manor in which it arose. Where manorial custom favored the tenant, he could get redress for eviction from the royal courts; where it did not, the courts would not help him. In general, Mr. Tawney agrees with Dr. Savine (*Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XIX, 33 f.) that copyholds for life were more numerous than copyholds of inheritance, and that, in consequence, the heir of the copyholder had no legal claim to his father's holding. If he wanted it, he had to dicker with the lord of the manor for it, and usually to pay an inheritance fine, which was sometimes fixed but more often variable at the will of the lord. Mr. Tawney notes, in a few manors, a steady upward movement in the amount of these fines during the sixteenth century. Dr. H. L. Gray, in a recent discussion before the

American Historical Association, has borne witness to the same tendency. But the matter of inheritance fines needs a good deal of investigating yet before any generalizations can safely be made in regard to it.

The last part of the book considers the relations of the government to the agrarian problem. The author traces here the development of the policy of the government from the beginning of the Tudors to about the middle of the seventeenth century. His opinion is that state intervention was in large measure dictated by a desire to maintain public order in the face of increasing agrarian discontent. He believes that most of the civil disturbances in the sixteenth century were largely, if not mainly, agrarian in their character. In consequence he attaches more importance to the economic motives in the Pilgrimage of Grace than Abbot Gasquet would allow, and insists that there was a larger economic factor in the Rising of the North than has usually been conceded. It is curious to discover, in this connection, that he has made no use of Miss Reid's notable essay on the Rising of the North (*Trans. Royal Hist. Society*, N.S., XX), which, on the whole, supports his view. He sees also a late expression of the agrarian discontent in the movement of the Levellers and of the Diggers under the Commonwealth. This last point is worth considering and deserves to be worked out more carefully.

Anyone familiar with the ways of Tudor and Stuart monarchs would expect to find a fiscal motive somewhere concealed in the attitude of the government toward enclosures. Mr. Tawney has not ignored this aspect of the matter. He points out that whereas, under the capitalist régime, the net produce of the soil was probably greater, the gross produce was probably less than under the old régime. Since the taxes fell upon the gross produce, increase of enclosure meant decrease of public revenue.

The author's discussion of the enforcement of the statutes designed to check enclosing is illuminating. In general he believes that these statutes had little practical effect, but he does not agree that they were altogether futile. No doubt they were passed reluctantly by landowning Knights of the Shire. The fact that they were passed at all is one more proof of the power of Tudor monarchs over their parliaments. No doubt they were languidly enforced by landowning Justices of the Peace. But the arm of the Privy Council was long and, objectionable as the Courts of Star Chamber and of Requests were from many points of view, they did serve on several occasions to defend the interests of the small holder against those of the class which monopolized local

administration. It is not surprising to discover that when these instruments of royalty were swept away and the landlords came to their own in the days of Long Parliament and the Commonwealth, the position of the copyholder was more precarious than ever it had been. No wonder if the common people preferred the tyranny of an individual before the tyranny of a class and sighed for the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth.

As a whole there can be little doubt that Mr. Tawney has made a valuable contribution to English agrarian history. He is thoroughly conversant with the literature of his subject and his analysis of the work of other investigators in his field has been careful and judicious. He has done a great deal of painstaking and profitable labor in the sources as well. And he has revealed an ability, unfortunately too rare in economic historians, to assimilate his material thoroughly and to present it in a form which is at once convincing and delightful. A few books of this sort will do more to stimulate a vital interest in the problems of economic history than any number of dry and dusty monographs.

It is to be regretted that, with a single eye to the social consequences of the enclosure movement, the author has not taken sufficiently into account its importance to progressive farming. One feels that if he had done so his condemnation of the movement would have been less sweeping and his final judgment more just. The fact is that Mr. Tawney has made himself the advocate of the small holder and has turned his very considerable abilities to the task of proving that the absence of any considerable number of small holders in England today is partly due to the iniquities of the sixteenth-century landlord. One suspects that he means to deal later with the enclosure movement of the eighteenth century in a similar spirit. He is too careful a scholar to allow his partisanship to lead him far astray, but that it has in some degree diminished the value of his book as sober history is undoubted. One should read Professor Gonner's recent book along with this one before attempting to form a final judgment as to the merits and demerits of the enclosure movement.

CONYERS READ

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

How to Analyze Railroad Reports. By JOHN MOODY. New York: Analyses Publishing Co., 1912. 16mo, pp. 218. \$2.00 net.

The rapid development of the railway business in the United States, together with the fact that railway stocks and bonds form a large part of all securities, has opened the way for a really serious and competent